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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Democratic Services Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, Usk on Monday, 10th March, 2025 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor David Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Tomos Davies, Meirion Howells,
Su McConnel, Peter Strong, John Crook, Rachel Buckler,
Tudor Thomas and Alistair Neill

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Pearson Local Democracy Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors Laura Wright

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence received from Councillor L Wright.

County Councillor A Neill was attending the meeting as a substitute member for County Councillor T Kear.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received

3. Electoral Review Consultation

The Local Democracy Manager provided the committee with an overview of the electoral review process and outlined that the committee are meeting to agree recommendations to put forward to cabinet who will approve a council response to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission Wales in relation to the size of the council on behalf of the Council.

An electoral review will consider the number of members of the Council for a local authority. The number, type and boundaries of electoral wards in to which the local authority is divided for the purpose of the election of councillors. The number of councillors to be elected for any electoral ward and the name of any electoral ward.

The initial consultation looks at the ideal size of the Council with the Commission looking for evidenced based responses that review the governance arrangements of the council to justify a specific number of councillors is required.

Members raised a number of questions and points regarding the review including;

- Noting that the consultation period for this part of the review was particularly short and did not allow enough time to gather views and evidence from elected members to provide the evidence based argument that the Commission was hoping for.
- Questioning whether Monmouthshire was likely to be reviewed prior to the 2027 elections or for the 2032 elections.
- How are community ward boundaries impacted as part of the review process?

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- Noted that from the electorate forecasts and the 20% limit on the average councillor to elector ratio, that a couple of wards will be outside that limit and need consideration as part of the review.
- Discussed the preference for single member wards over multi member wards.
- Discussed the Commissions recommendations for Welsh only ward names
- Noted the difficulty in providing information on the future governance arrangements when elements of that process are the responsibility of the leader of the Council. Similarly, it was noted that in a Council where there is no large controlling group, by the time the required posts are filled on a politically balanced basis, there are few members left to undertake the remaining roles compared to that of the group that is not in control of the Council.

The committee concluded to recommend to Cabinet that a response to the Commission is provided outlining the following points;

- That the Council is allowed flexibility in recommending to the Commission a suitable size of the Council once the electoral review for Monmouthshire commences. The committee was content with the methodology used by the Commission to calculate a range of councillors (41-48) that the council should have and will provide evidence based arguments as part of the review process to justify the number of councillors within that range.
- That single member wards are preferred and considered initially over multi member wards.
- A consensus could not be reached in using Welsh only ward names but recommend that the Commission use bilingual ward names. Additionally, local flexibility should be given in naming the new wards so that the ward name reflects an identity locally.
- That the Commission note the impact of the political balance on the governance arrangements of the Council which cannot be accounted for and not known until after an election and until after the review recommendations have taken effect.

The meeting ended at 16:00